

# TUI MOTU

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## Gathering the Family



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*Light of Christmas*

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## EDITORIAL

### Finding Strength in Family Gathering

Families gather at Christmas — around the table, over the phone, or with FaceTime — threading bonds of love and belonging around them, whether they're close-by or distant. And they generally look out for those who otherwise would be on their own, gathering them too into the family fold. Birth, promise and hope give impetus to this season of generosity and inclusion as you'll read in the articles and art in this issue.

This year our Christmas comes on the rumbling undertow of three quakes — the earthquake and aftershocks disrupting the northern part of the South Island and Wellington; the outcome of the USA elections affecting the world; and the exposé that New Zealand is ankle-deep in arms dealing.

Although the Kaikoura quake devastated homes, livelihoods, land and infrastructure, it was a natural disaster — a shifting of Earth's bones — and the response was immediate and inspirational. We saw care and support given to people and other life — cows and marine animals. We recognised a community at work in the tirelessness, courage and neighbourliness of so many. We saw a fulfilment of the promise of the Christ baby to draw people together.

In contrast the other two quakes promote division, insularity and the fragmentation of community. We take no responsibility for the USA election other than the caution to deal with our own disaffection so it does not infect our society.

But to learn that the New Zealand government is promoting an arms industry in which 250 New Zealand companies are involved in the provision of weapons, military hardware and services, is devastating. It is unconscionable that our country, with decades of commitment to peacemaking, is now supporting the likes of Assad and Putin in bombing Syrian families, helping Saudi Arabia wage war on Yemeni families and allowing Baka Haram to kidnap children. To our shame, it signals profits before community and implicates us in an Herodian killing of the innocents.

Still we'll gather at Christmas — at home, Church and holidays — and we'll find in these gatherings new spirit and energy for the efforts ahead. We'll recommit ourselves to hope, to God's dream for a peaceful world, our common home.

We thank all our contributors to this Christmas issue, especially the artists at St Teresa School, Bluff. We include the Christmas Gift promotion.

Please contact us if you need more cards.

Happy Christmas to you!

As always, our last word is a blessing. ■

# A Decent, Fair Society

**A**cross the Anglo-American world in the 1980s, including New Zealand, neo-liberal doctrines went viral.

In 1987 Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, gave a speech in which she declared: "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families."

Unfortunately, however, she was mistaken. There is such a thing as society.

Since time immemorial, human beings have worked together in groups beyond the individual and families to ensure their well-being and survival. The emergence of language, and kinship, the nation state and other forms of social organisation are key markers in the history of our species. *Homo sapiens* is above all, a social animal.

If we are to survive and prosper in a globalised world, human beings have to learn to work together in increasingly complex and sophisticated ways. This requires a measure of trust, empathy and mutual understanding.

Since the 1980s, however, neo-liberal doctrines have led us in the opposite direction. The idea that there is no such thing as society was not just wrong, but extremely damaging.

As the idea of the "cost-benefit-calculating individual" took hold, selfishness and greed were reframed as virtues. Families were weakened. Fraud and profiteering became commonplace. Rivers, lakes, beaches and fisheries were ruined. Trust and empathy began to fail.

With no understanding of the purposes of institutions above the level of the family, these have been remodelled in the image of the cost-benefit-calculating individual. Schools, universities and hospitals are set to compete with one another, even if this defeats the functions for which they exist — passing on knowledge and healing the sick.

Fractured, fractious, highly unequal societies in which many people feel radically alienated and dispossessed, are the logical outcome. Not surprisingly, policies based on mistaken ideas about



*They yearn for a Kiwi bottom-line... integrity and decency in governance and commerce; a good life for ordinary people; affordable homes; clean rivers and beaches; and a fair go for all. In this lies a sense of optimism and hope.*

how human societies work and what it takes to succeed in the contemporary world have proved to be dysfunctional.

In New Zealand this transformation has been particularly traumatic. A small, intimate society that was once relatively equal, where ideas of decency, integrity and a "fair go" were fundamental, has struggled to cope with the impact of neo-liberal philosophies.

Many New Zealanders today are incensed by the sight of families sleeping in cars, children living in poverty and dying from third-world diseases, and other evidence of radical

disparities in wealth and life chances.

They are sickened to see lakes and rivers turning toxic, to hear forests falling silent and to know that the vast majority of native species of birds and fish are at risk. They feel that their own best values — and their country — have been betrayed.

In many ways, they are right. In any society, the balance between individual aspiration and freedom, and the common good is delicate. In the early 1980s there is no doubt that many New Zealanders felt stifled by the imposition of collective restraints.

Today, however, there are many who feel that the balance has tipped too far in the opposite direction and that the neo-liberal promise of freedom was dishonest, or just for a privileged few.

They yearn for a Kiwi bottom-line that is not just about money, but upholds basic values which most New Zealanders still cherish — integrity and decency in governance and commerce; a good life for ordinary people; affordable homes; clean rivers and beaches; and a fair go for all.

In this lies a sense of optimism and hope. Irrespective of which political party is in power, or whether we are dealing with central or local government, iwi leaders or the civil service, the corporate sector or other institutions, New Zealanders from all walks of life have the right to demand that their basic values are upheld.

So many Kiwis are sick and tired of cynicism and greed, lies and spin, and profiteering at the expense of people, land, sea and waterways. It is not just many corporates, but also government itself in New Zealand that is in danger of losing its social licence to operate.

It must be past time to draw a line in the sand and tell our leaders what kind of country we want and what is unacceptable. It is time to take care of our beautiful land. ■



**Dame Anne Salmond** is a Distinguished Professor at the University of Auckland and was the 2013 Kiwibank New Zealander of the Year.

# CHRISTMAS

## *in different times*



**NICHOLAS THOMPSON** discusses the changing focus and meaning of Christmas over the Christian centuries.

**T**he incongruity of celebrating a winter festival in the middle of summer has become almost a cliché of New Zealand writing about Christmas. As everyone “knows,” the date of Christmas stems from the church’s attempt to replace the older Roman feast of the Unconquered Sun, which marked the winter solstice. But the evidence for this much alleged “fact” of Christmas lore is actually quite thin. There’s at least equal reason to think that the dating of Christmas comes from early Christian speculation that March 25th was the date, not just of Jesus’ crucifixion, but of his incarnation, too. Early Christian writers thought it only right that Jesus should have spent a perfect 33 years in the world — no more and no fewer. On the same basis they deemed it fitting that he should be born in Bethlehem, a perfect nine months after the date of his conception.

### **In the Grand Sweep of Salvation**

Whatever the ultimate origins of Christmas, the earliest writing about Christmas shows very little interest in the connection between the feast and the human details of the Christmas story (let alone the

hoar frosts of inherited Christmas imagery). Instead, they’re concerned with fitting Bethlehem into the grand sweep of the biblical drama, from creation through incarnation, redemption, judgement, to the restoration of all things in Christ.

Few of these ancient texts are still in use, but the opening verse of a fourth century Latin hymn *Corde natus ex parentis* (translated by the Anglican hymn-writer John Mason Neale) gives a sense of where the early Church’s Christmas attention was focused:

Of the Father’s love begotten,  
Ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega,  
He the source, the ending He,  
Of the things that are, that have been,  
And that future years shall see,  
Evermore and evermore!

When the fourth verse of this hymn lights briefly on the Virgin and her baby, it’s like a plane gliding onto the tarmac and then taking straight off again. Hardly have we come down to earth before we’re ascending to the heights of a pre-Copernican cosmos to join angelic hosts praising

the long expected Saviour and awaiting his return as the judge of the living and the dead.

### **Mother and Child**

Contrast this with a better known Christmas song written over a thousand years later, the so-called *Coventry Carol*:

Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child  
By by, lully, lulla thou little tiny child,  
By by, lully, lullay.

O sisters, too, how may we do  
For to preserve this day  
This poor youngling for whom we do  
sing  
By by, lully, lullay?

Although this carol is sometimes now sung in Christmas services, it comes from the text of a mystery play based on the Gospel of Matthew and performed in the English city of Coventry in the 1530s (though the text is possibly older than this). It imagines the mothers of Bethlehem singing a lullaby to calm Jesus; they’re worried about how to protect this “little, tiny child” from Herod’s hit-men. Unlike *Corde Natus*, the *Coventry*



*Carol* focuses on the immediate details of Jesus' birth, and, more importantly, on the experience of the women touched by it. While the writer of *Corde Natus* invites us to soar from Bethlehem into a timeless "ever more and ever more," the writer of the *Coventry Carol* wants us to linger in first-century Bethlehem, forming an emotional bond with a tiny child and those gathered around his crib. This kind of Christmas is probably much more familiar to us: the "Christmas story," the children's pageant, and the bonds of family and friendship that mark this time of year.

### Franciscan Influence

The reason for this evolution of Christmas lies in the high Middle Ages, and in the spirituality of the Franciscan order. It's often said that Francis of Assisi advised his followers to: "Preach the Gospel everywhere, using words if necessary." Although Francis almost certainly didn't say this, it does reflect his approach to preaching. Neither Francis nor most of his earliest followers had any theological training, let alone preaching experience. History doesn't record how many tendentious, boring or plain crackpot sermons they delivered. I suspect there were quite a few. But it does record Francis's genius in making the Gospel accessible to urban laypeople hungry for Christian instruction.

### Francis and the Crib

In one of the best known episodes of Francis's life, the saint mounted the pulpit during midnight Mass in the town of Greccio. There, two weeks earlier, he had set up a full-scale model of the cave at Bethlehem, with an ox, an ass, a manger and an image of the baby Jesus lying in it. Francis preached about the Christmas story so vividly that the congregation later swore they could hear the noises of the farm animals gathered at the manger. During the sermon he brought the image of the baby Jesus down to the congregation so that they could venerate it. After Mass the people took home pieces of straw; rumours of the miracles worked by these Christmas "relics" quickly spread.

### From Monastery to Nursery

The new-model preachers took a theology elaborated in the monastic liturgies of early Christendom, and re-established it in a world of mothers who knew how to sing a baby back to sleep and worry about its future. Earlier Christmas texts had pointed beyond Bethlehem to the unfathomable mysteries of creation and redemption. Theirs was largely a theology of monastics. The Christmas of the high Middle Ages was a feast of the first towns and cities to emerge after the fall of the Roman Empire. It was a feast of merchants and tradespeople who wanted a theology rooted in the world of the senses, the emotions and the struggles of day-to-day life. Although it would be true to say that both the earlier and later Christmas texts were broadly incarnational (it's hard not to be incarnational at Christmas) the feast we've inherited from the Middle Ages pays far closer attention to the Jesus of first-century Palestine than to "the one who ascended far above all the heavens so that he might fill up all things" (Ephesians 4:10).

### And Today

Which is all a way of saying that New Zealanders need not worry unduly about the "authenticity" of their Christmas. As it gradually adjusted to new historical contexts in the millennium between 400 and 1500, the scope of this festival changed significantly. Likewise, if we're still celebrating Christmas in another five hundred years — maybe in China or sub-Saharan Africa — it seems likely that the story of Bethlehem will still feature somewhere, but what the feast will look like beyond that, we can only guess. ■

Top: *Gebert Christi*, Meister von Hohenfurth [Wikipedia]

Middle: *Theotokos and the Christ Child*, icon

Bottom: *The Nativity*, Lorenzo Leonbruno da Mantova [Google Art Project]



**Nick Thompson** is Senior Lecturer in Theological and Religious Studies at the University of Auckland.



## PETER MURNANE uses the image of drawing ends together to illustrate the birth of Jesus as the beginning and the end.

A man who had worked on Melbourne's ill-fated West Gate bridge once told me that in the days before it collapsed during construction killing 35 men, the workers knew well it was under dangerous stress. They were alarmed at the rust flakes that began pinging from the iron deck after the engineers had placed heavy concrete blocks on one of the halves, to force them to meet in the middle.

It is often hard to bring the ends together. Machinists and surgeons are familiar with the problem, not to mention accountants and families on limited budgets. When we have gained a few kilograms our belt can defy us, but the many rifts that divide our world today are no joke.

### Making Divisions

Cunning manipulators use the media to convince us that we need to be defended from the various "others" who are our "enemies". They subtly demonise Muslims, Blacks and criminals. They call "illegal" those people fleeing for their lives from countries smashed by our wars. Society's leaders try to convince us that life is a perpetual struggle between us and "them". The same leaders profit from our fear and by giving us what they call "security". They profit from the dividing walls, the prisons and most of all, from the wars and weapons themselves.

### Exploiters and Exploited

Our attention is distracted from the real gap: between exploiters and exploited; between billion-dollar arms deals and land-grabs and those left landless or suffering the effects of ensuing pollution. The more suspicion and conflict they can create, the more opportunities there are for the cunning to collect their spoils.

### Born into Relationships

Was it meant to be like this? Moments after our birth, gentle hands held us and took care of us. Those hands,

whether white or "coloured"; local or "foreign", were guided by hearts that felt deep compassion for our weakness and our needs. They cared for this helpless creature, newly separated from its mother, because it was just like themselves.

We have a need and a hunger to relate to others.

How can we reach a point where we

cause others pain; wage war without rules; even bomb civilians and torture prisoners because "their side" has different political goals or different beliefs? How do such chasms of greed and anger grow and widen in our hearts?

### Separated by Self-Centredness

In the last few centuries since the Enlightenment, we began more than

before to see the world with its creatures as merely an object to study

and use. We forgot that because we all come from the one Source we are related to every aspect and every life. We

began to lose our reason to love. Success

in the material sciences even led us to believe that ours is the only consciousness in the universe. Is this not hubris, blasphemous self-centredness, worse than in Greek tragedy?

We can reduce everything to digital quantities and market everything living or inanimate, yet cease to remember that this amazing, complex world could exist only because of a Mind greater than ours; not only a Mind, but "the Love which moves the sun and the other stars" (Dante, *Paradiso*, XXXIII).

### Memory of Christmas

Part of our human family retains a memory which we replay and cherish each Christmas: an ancient belief that the Logos, the Wisdom of God, came among us. This memory tells us that he was born among Bethlehem's bleating sheep and goats and was cared for by worried parents. They called him Jesus. This unfathomable mystery of the Christ in human flesh shows amazed believers that nothing





can separate us from the Star-Maker who is seeking us out. Not even the ignorance of those religious people who would fence off “sacred places” and try to keep separate the “holy” from the “profane”. The Holy One shares holiness with us all.

### **Christ Bridging the Gap**

That baby grew into the one who more than any before sought to bridge the gap between the “normal” and the “others”; the lost and rejected, the hated and despised. How do we know? Because he touched them, ate with them and became like them. He was murdered for being on their side. The witnesses say he passed through death and reappeared unexpectedly among his friends, but living now in another dimension, the Cosmic Christ.

This human-God is in every part of the vast universe. Now we can know that Infinite Love is our friend, within reach. This Cosmic Christ, fired by immense personal love for every one of our race, has reached across the gulf of death to re-connect any brokenness; to free anyone afraid of the darkness of death itself.

The love-power of the Cosmic Christ makes nonsense of any theory that the world might remain divided into those whom God accepts and those others rejected forever in “hell”. The theories that demanded this dreadful separation as necessary to fulfil God’s justice were as doomed as was ancient astronomy, once Copernicus showed that the planets revolve around the sun. Such dualist division is incompatible with the justice of the Cosmic Christ which will heal and restore us all.

The world knew resurrection before the *Logos* came. There were millions of sunrises and spring returned each year to the turning earth. Long before the present, there was a moment when life sprang forth where none had been before. Through subsequent aeons, higher life-forms in their millions evolved from lesser creatures. Now that we humans populate the globe, how many broken people every day are raised to new life by a word, a smile, a hug, or a kiss?

*They called him Jesus.  
This unfathomable  
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us out.*



### **Gathered by Love-Christ**

All the uncounted stars and planets scattered through the universe with whatever life is on them; all life on our own planet; all these, say the theologians, are the Creator’s footprints, visible traces of the Unseeable. They all spring from the mind of the *Logos* — also known to us as *Sophia*/Divine Wisdom, the Cosmic Christ. Since the *Logos* lived among us in human flesh and has conquered death, the universe itself is now the body of Christ.

Christ’s followers gather and present to God all that we know and do. At the summit of the Eucharistic celebration we declare that we offer it: “Through Him, with Him and in Him”, stating that we ourselves live within the power of the Cosmic Christ. We then break and share the body of Christ, not as

a reward for good deeds or to boost our ego, but to know again what and who we are becoming.

### **We Become Love and Forgiveness**

We do not wait for the Cosmic Christ to change history. As we begin to understand that we share Christ’s life, we no longer imagine that the world is centred on ourselves. No “others” can remain our enemy, for all are becoming part of this Christ, as we begin to change how we treat them.

We do not have to persuade them to follow Christ: they will find Christ in our forgiveness and love.

And what of our future? St Paul, who had himself glimpsed the Risen Christ and was radically changed, wrote gloriously about God’s dream to bring all the ends together in “the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him” (Eph 1:10). With such a promise, how can we let fear divide us? ■

Illustration by Sandy Leitua. Used with permission.

Rainbow photo by Abigail Keenan. Used with permission.



**Peter Murnane** is an Australian Dominican Friar. He worked in New Zealand for 20 years before spending four years in the Solomon Islands.

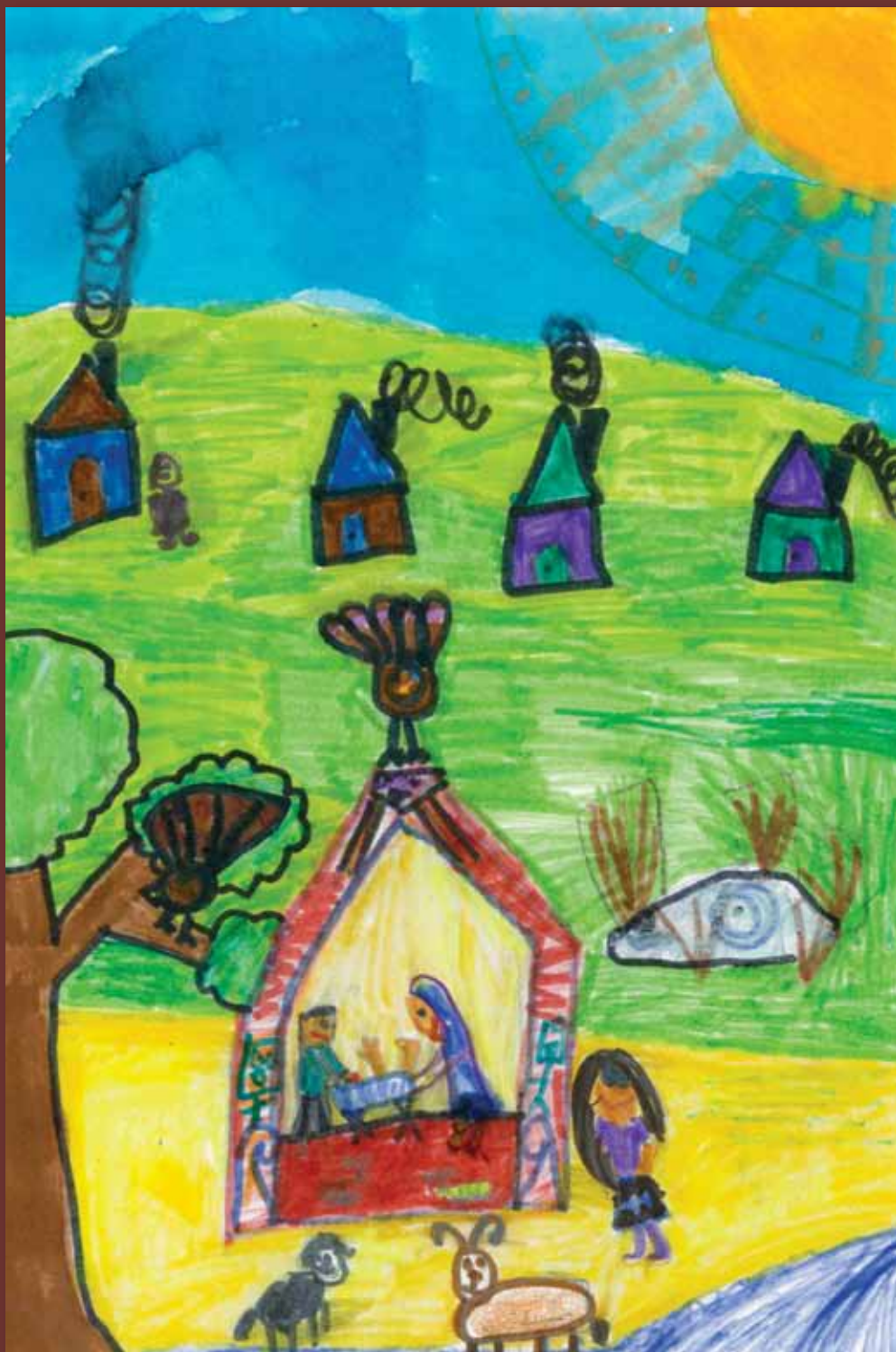
# Reverencing *Whanaungatanga*

**MAKARETA TAWAROA** reflects on living with family in ancestral land and how Christmas draws their past, present and future together in hope.

I was talking recently to a cousin living in Porirua who hates Christmas because it places too much stress on her. She applied for the benefit when she left her job to be at home with her children and found the process very complex and embarrassing. She is a great cook, keeps a reasonably tidy house and does her best to meet the needs of her growing children. She tries hard to keep to a strict budget but isn't able to make ends meet and finds it difficult to stay out of debt. There is always extra pressure when one of the children gets sick, or has a game out of town. She is constantly tired and has to rely on the older children to do extra. She dislikes the constant bombardment of advertising and the effects that it has on her kids, who are growing up with high economic expectations that she cannot meet. The six-week school summer holiday is way too long as it's hard for her to keep the children meaningfully occupied without pulling her hair out. Trying to get children to bed at a reasonable hour with daylight saving is impossible. Consequently, Christmas is a very low-key affair in her home.

My brief conversation highlighted the challenges that many of our families face at this time of the year, reinforcing the growing gap between the rich and the poor, families with support and those mainly coping alone.

Unlike my cousin, I look forward to Christmas. Living on my home *marae* with *mokopuna*/ young children and surrounded by family, makes a big difference. Next door to me is a *kohanga reo*/





preschool, a community centre and a parking paddock which doubles as a playing field. Just over the fence is a small family burial ground and further along are the *kaumatua*/seniors' flats and a small church. A little further on is the *marae ātea*, a busy place where *hui*/meetings, *wānanga*/teaching and *tangi*/funerals are held. We live a simple life but there is something deeply reassuring when surrounded by sacred sites that resonate with the sound of one's ancient past.

## Strengthening Relationships

When I first came home over 20 years ago, one of my nieces brought her family to live with me. I had as many as seven *mokopuna* at any one time, ranging from two to 20 years, of several different families, over different periods of time. Learning to live well at close quarters with this real family was a steep learning curve for me.

There was always something happening on the *marae* — *hui*, *wānanga* or a *tangi*. Being involved helped us to value our *whanaungatanga*, that broad tapestry of relationships, the different roles for men and women, experiencing our broader tribal and intertribal connections, and showing respect for our dead. We actively promoted our Māori spirituality, local dialect and values.

On 28th February every year we support Pakaitore Day, celebrating our *Whanganuitanga*. It is an opportunity to build relationships between *hapu*/kinship groups, strengthen our sense of community and to reflect on our status as *iwi*/tribe within Whanganui.

## Collaborating as Family

We are also fortunate in being able to deepen our family bonds by becoming an official "home-school". Our *mokopuna* were not happy at the local state school so we created our own learning centre. We devised a one-to-one individualised learning programme within a safe, homely, non-competitive setting. It is compatible with the children's interests and at a pace they can cope with.

We use our home and property as the setting for learning. We have chooks and ducks, a vegetable garden

and an orchard which we all help to look after. We have a wide range of tools for projects and making stuff. In the backyard is a trampoline and a basketball net.

Unconsciously we are building traditions of doing things together, developing a sense of identity and stability within a three, sometimes four-generational family on our grandmother's land.

## Celebrating Together

As a family, we always celebrate special occasions — birthdays, school achievements, sport awards — and Christmas is one of our favourite times. We plan together, giving one another the opportunity to have a say. On Christmas morning we get up at 6 am and open our presents. We make a big effort to attend Mass. We love singing Christmas carols. *The Little Drummer Boy* is our favourite. We set the table with goodies to eat after Mass as Father sometimes comes to share a little Christmas cheer.

## Remembering Our Roots

I've always had an interest in our tribal genealogy so I really enjoy reading the first chapter of Matthew's Gospel with its lengthy list of the ancestors of Jesus covering generations from Abraham to David, from the deportation to Babylon, to the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:1–17). There's also a genealogy in Ruth (4:18) and the stories of kingly descendants of David in Kings I, II. At the end of Matthew's genealogy we find: "Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and from her came Jesus who is called the Christ, the Messiah" (Mt 1:16).

Every year on 1 December, we celebrate *Te Ra of Nga Paerangi* (*Nga Paerangi Day*). Many of our families did not know their history so *Nga Paerangi Day* was set aside for those who want to learn more, to know who they are connected to and to learn the stories and history of their ancestors. Many *iwi* across the country are doing something similar, including holding *kapa haka* competitions. It's wonderful to see families working on their family trees, sharing photos, tracing the criss-crossing of ancestors in families, finding out hitherto unknown

connections. It is for us now what Isaiah said long ago: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Is 9:1).

This year the Samuel Drew lecture series presented by Dr Michelle Horwood, long-time curator of the Whanganui Museum, has given us more of our family story. Michelle introduced a large collection of Māori ethnographic items collected by an Englishman, Charles Smith, who knew our old people over a century ago. This collection adds greatly to our knowledge of family and understanding of *iwi* and settler interactions on the Whanganui River during the mid-19th century. The actual collection is housed in the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, UK, where it had been sold after Smith's death. A group from *Nga Paerangi* travelled to see it in 2013 and the lectures connect us once again to our ancestors.

## Bringing Past, Present and Hope Together

Like our mothers and fathers in faith, we *Nga Paerangi* are journeying in faith coming to our true identity as "God's grace revealed". Jesus, born of Mary, true human and true God, entered into our history and shares our journey revealing the grace, mercy and tender love of the Father. Jesus, love created, pitches his *whare*/home on our *marae*, in our *rohe*/lands, giving meaning to our life and our history.

We include my cousin and the thousands carrying heavy burdens at this time as we join the shepherds, the outcasts of their time, who were the first to receive the news of Jesus' birth with the message of joy and hope for us and the whole world: "You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger . . . peace among those whom God favours!" (Lk 2:12-14). ■

Painting by Ayla McNaughton (aged 9)  
St Teresa School, Bluff.



**Makareta Tawaroa** is a Josephite Sister, a Nanny, enjoys reading local history and is a lover of stray cats.



# LIGHT, SONG, FOOD, FAMILY AND FAITH AT CHRISTMAS

FRITZI and ROMY UDANGA describe celebrating Christmas in the Philippines and in New Zealand.



It is December once again and we can't help but think about Christmas celebrations back home in the Philippines. Christmas is the most important holiday in our country, the only predominantly Christian nation in Asia, whose population is about 80 per cent Catholic. The Christmas season there is the longest and merriest in the world.

We definitely miss the trappings and traditional activities of Christmas: Christmas lanterns, carolling, *Misa de Gallo* and *Noche Buena* are a few that come to mind. But most of all we miss the laughter and family banter that erupt as our families come together. We see Christmas as a time for forgiving and reconciliation, for sharing and giving and definitely a big time of food and fun for everyone.

Officially, the Christmas season starts on 16 December and ends on the celebration of the Epiphany, or Feast of the Three Kings. But any Filipino child or adult will tell you that when the "ber" months come, Christmas is in the air. So unofficially, the Christmas season starts in September and ends in January.

Radios, malls, even public transport, start blaring out Christmas

songs in September. Offices and homes begin hanging Christmas lanterns and putting up Christmas trees, and everyone launches into planning which Christmas parties to attend, who to visit and when they will be hosting parties in return.

## Christmas Lanterns

Filipino Christmas decorations are many and beautiful but the Christmas lantern, or *parol*, is the most popular. Traditionally, it is made from bamboo strips put together to form a five-pointed, 3-D star wrapped with coloured tissue paper or cellophane. It represents the star of Bethlehem that guided the Magi searching for the new-born Jesus.

Makeshift street stores start selling Christmas lanterns as early as September. They are so lovely, especially at night when their flickering rhythm announces the Christmas festivity. Streets are lit by massive light displays and every house hangs lanterns. Once the sun sets the neighbourhood turns into a wonderland of dazzling, colourful lights.

Christmas lanterns serve as a beacon to family and friends with the invitation — "Be home this Christmas".

And although airfares are more than double during the Christmas season, many Filipinos respond to that call. Even if they can stay for only a fortnight, they go home because Christmas is the time to gather. Like the shepherds and kings gathering around Jesus in Bethlehem in the biblical story, Christmas is a homecoming for family members and a time of reunion with high school friends and university mates.

## Christmas Carolling

Christmas isn't Christmas without someone or some group coming to sing carols at the house, mostly in the evenings. Enthusiastic child carollers start visiting homes with their maracas made of bottle caps flattened and loosely nailed or tied together, as early as 1 December and continue up to the New Year. After their carol singing, including "We Wish You a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year", the homeowner gives them a cash gift (*koha*) or lollies.

Adult carollers are more sophisticated. A group would have its own guitarist and sometimes other instrument players to accompany the singers. Some groups dress-up



and give ample notice that they are coming your way. When that happens the carollers are served a sumptuous dinner as well.

### Novena of Misa de Gallo

The formal Christmas celebration starts on 16 December, with the *Misa de Gallo*, literally Mass of the Rooster, as it can begin when the roosters start

arriving home after midnight Mass, the little ones are awakened from their naps. The food is brought out and the midnight feast, or *Noche Buena* begins.

In some homes the *Noche Buena* is a family affair. In ours it is a big, open-house celebration with family, friends and neighbours dropping in to wish everyone *Maligayang Pasko*—

midnight Mass go to Mass on Christmas morning. Then the Filipino Christmas Day tradition begins when children are taken to visit their godparents and elderly relatives. Children pay their respects with a *mano* — kissing the hand or bringing the hand of their elders to their forehead. In return they receive a blessing or a gift.



to crow as early as 4 am. Also known as the Dawn Mass, or *Simbang Gabi* in the vernacular, the *Misa de Gallo* is a Novena Mass in preparation for Christmas. It is a Filipino Catholic custom to gather for Eucharist in the pre-dawn hours on each of the nine days before Christmas.

Our childhood memory of *Misa de Gallo* involves being roused from sleep to join crowds in an often standing-room-only Mass. We can still see ourselves as young children, properly dressed up, snoozing on our feet, wedged between our father and mother, or with our other siblings. After Mass we would crowd around stalls offering a host of freshly cooked rice-cake delicacies. The cool morning breeze and the taste of *puto bungbong* and *bibinka* sweet rice-cakes and warm tea give *Misa de Gallo*, as the anticipation of Christmas, a tangible aspect.

### Noche Buena

On Christmas Eve, like all our neighbours, we children would stay up until it is time to attend midnight Mass — Christmas Eve Mass. Then, when everyone begins

Merry Christmas!

Most households spread their table generously including *lechon* (roasted pig), ham, *queso de bola* (ball of cheese), fruit salad, rice cakes and other sweets, steamed rice, and different types of drinks, including the traditional *salabat* (ginger brew), *tsokolate* (hot chocolate) and coffee, and my favourite, *arroz caldo* (chicken rice soup) and creamy macaroni-chicken soup.

Then on Christmas morning we wake anticipating Santa Claus's gifts filling the stockings hung the night before. In our country where all apples are imported, because we don't have apple trees, finding an apple in our socks is a treat. Children treasure the apple, together with the sweets and coins they jingle throughout the day.

### Paying Our Respect

Those who weren't able to attend

### Celebrating in New Zealand

More than 50,000 Filipinos, a significant number, are living in New Zealand and keep the Christmas customs alive here. Several churches now offer Novena Masses at dawn, usually organised by Filipino parishioners. We take turns visiting the homes of friends and acquaintances to sing Christmas carols. We share with friends and family our tables which are replete with traditional food on Christmas Eve for *Noche Buena*, and yes, we also hang Christmas lanterns.

Although we are living away from the Philippines, by keeping alive our traditions of celebrating Christmas, we maintain our ties with families and friends back home and we highlight the most significant aspect—Christmas is the time for families to come home to Jesus. ■

*Parol* photos © Mario Barbiera 2016  
Carolling children: © Alami Stock Photo  
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**Romy and Fritzi Udanga** are involved in the Auckland pre-marriage programme, Catholic Filipino Chaplaincy and Diocese Pastoral Council. They and their two children have lived in NZ for a decade.





# CHRISTMAS IN THE Fiji Islands

**JOHN PICKERING**  
writes about the  
values that keep  
Fijian families  
continuing to  
gather in their  
home places at  
Christmas.

**C**hristianity first came to our shores at the dawn of the 19th century and the missionaries played a huge role in sweeping changes in our culture. However a part that has stood the test of time is the unity and strength of family. Family life remains as important today as it was before. Christianity with its emphasis on building unity and strengthening community, resonated well with the Fijian understanding of extended family.

Fiji was ceded to Great Britain in 1874 and in order to help the relatively young colony pay its way in the world, cheap labour was imported from India in the form of the Indentured Labour system. Fortunately the colonial Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, was adamant that the indigenous way of life must be maintained and the migration policies reflected the Governor's views toward indigenous Fijians. In many ways this helped to preserve the customs and rituals of the indigenous Fijians up to the present.

Indigenous Fijian culture places great value on building relationships and has many rituals for sustaining and cementing relationships. People define themselves in terms of family kinship and the close family ties are a priority for families. It is at Christmas that we see many of the rituals around family celebrated with the central Christmas message of love, peace and joy.

Christmas is family time and we witness the efforts families make to be together and experience the power of families. Those in the towns and cities want to return to their villages to spend Christmas there. Those who live overseas also try to return home. Because many family members are together, we are able to celebrate other events as well, such as reconciliations, marriage, presenting new babies and marking anniversaries.

## **Restoring Relationships**

Keeping family relationships harmonious isn't always an easy exercise. By their very nature families are fragile because the people who make them up are themselves vulnerable and the possibility of family disagreements, feuds and fragmentation is an ever present reality. For example, a common issue many families face is when young couples elope. In our culture, where



we place strong emphasis on family ties, this poses serious problems not only for the young couple, but for their families as well — particularly when the families have known each other for a long time. Suddenly families stop talking to each other and their extended families tend to get involved and take sides. Division is wedged between them.

There is no better time than Christmas for healing to begin. The families can come together and through rituals of speech, gift exchange and the kava ceremony, relationships and the unity of community is able to be restored. The Christmas hope for peace, joy and unity takes on a concrete expression.

## Identity and Belonging

We have rituals that mark life events from the moment a child is born until death claims that life. They express our deepest yearnings and they hold together the framework that assists us to relate in our families, community and the world.

We believe that we need to know our roots in order to know ourselves. So Christmas is a time when we return to our roots in order to strengthen our identity and grounding.

We think of marriage as affecting the whole community. It is about the two people coming together in love and commitment — for Catholics it is celebrated with the sacrament of marriage — but it is more. Marriage is an important family event through which new networks of family relationship are forged. Entire communities celebrate the event with their presence, bringing gifts and sharing in the feasting.

## Family Celebrations

Like most families, my parents always ensured that we all had new clothes for Christmas. It would have been unthinkable not to go to Mass (most often midnight Mass).

I remember clearly when I first left home to study, and later to work, how all roads led home at Christmas. My mother would make numerous calls to me and my siblings to ensure that we would be home for Christmas and



we were each allotted tasks in the preparation of the Christmas meal.

Our *lovo*/earth oven was prepared for taro, chicken and pork. We seemed to prepare more food than anyone could eat but it wasn't only for us. It was also for the families who came to visit us. I remember bowls and baskets of food being taken around villages and seeing the generosity being reciprocated. Food is always important, but it is not just about the food itself. It is about the spirit of sharing and giving.

After our heavy lunch and a rest, the kava drinking would begin with lots of singing, dancing and visiting. Christmas presents were given to the young children but for the older ones, having new clothes for Christmas Eve Mass was all that mattered.

Christmas is celebrated as a holiday by everyone in Fiji, not just Christians. Our Hindu brothers and sisters celebrate just as we join in the Hindu Feast of Lights. Indian families will normally buy a goat for their shared meal.

Both of my parents have passed on to their eternal reward now. This morning as I tried putting some thoughts together, one of my sisters rang asking the inevitable question: "What are we having for Christmas?" She wasn't asking me about the details of logistics or any of that. She was really asking me about what

would be on the Christmas menu. Food is that important to us.

## Significance of Gathering

Every year in Fiji families spend huge amounts of money preparing for Christmas. They pay for travel, food and the endless drums of kerosene, bales of cloth, cartons of foodstuffs, mats and other items. Christmas is not a time to spare any expense or to hold back. It is about total and absolute giving.

For the outsider these lavish preparations can be misconstrued as being unnecessary and expensive but for us they are important and must be carried out. Fulfilling our cultural obligations is as natural to us as the air that we breathe. Christmas is a communal and family affair and when viewed from this perspective joy, peace and unity take on a whole new outlook and meaning. Christmas joy is expressed in our presence and experienced in the spirit of love among us. The very thought of Christmas with all that it entails is enough to keep me excited. ■

*Lovo photograph by Samantha Russell.*



**John Pickering** is the Director of Communications for the Archdiocese of Suva, Fiji Islands and has a background in Catholic Education.

# Retyping the Broken Bond



CECILY McNEILL reflects on the experience of adoption and reconnecting.

I looked at the group of nine-year-olds knowing my son was among them. “Which one is he?” she asked. I was dumb and mortified. How could I know. The last time I saw him, he was just five days old yet capable of growing into any of these beautiful boys.

He was 21 when I met him again — living in the south of France, having grown up in New Caledonia. An avowed Kiwi, the first thing he wanted to do when he came to New Zealand was to ask the Social Welfare Department how he came to be adopted outside the country. When I met his mother in Noumea (who showed me the photo of our boy at 9), she said adoption staff had told her it would be impossible for me to find them because they lived in another country.

After his first child was born, he wrote of the importance of knowing where you come from and I knew my years of wandering in a numb wilderness had ended.

In 1976 having carried this growing baby for nine months, I signed a paper, the top half of which was covered so that I could not see the names of the adoptive parents. I believe I would have consented to his being taken out of the country but this moment quickly became blurred in my memory as my sentient being dealt with the loss.

## Earlier Adoption Practices

Adoption law in New Zealand is governed by the Adoption Act 1955 and the Adult Adoption Information Act 1985. In the early 1970s, until the Domestic Purposes Benefit gave sole parents with dependent children a small income in 1973, a large number of children were placed for adoption.

Mary Iwanek, who had emigrated from the Netherlands to New Zealand and practised as a social worker for 50 years, remembers that until the early 1970s New Zealand with its strong religious influences had the highest number of adoptions in the western world.

At that time adoption was shrouded in secrecy — adoptive babies were issued with a new birth certificate showing the names of the adoptive parents only once the final order went through six months after birth.

Mary had been shocked to see how badly unmarried mothers were treated here. At home, she had helped care for her unmarried sister's child in a much freer society where “unwanted” babies were absorbed into the extended family.

She wrote about the attitude: “The literature frequently describes unmarried, pregnant women as immature and unstable; young girls whose pregnancy had occurred through irresponsible behaviour and sexual activity.” So it was easy to promulgate the idea that birth mothers did not want the children they bore.

Anne Aburn, an adoption officer, noted in 2014 when reviewing the Adult Adoption Information Act, that the “complete break theory” had prevailed at the time. It held that environment would overcome heredity — “that a child placed into an adoptive family should grow up ‘as if born to them.’”



## Efforts to Change Adoption Law and Practice

In the first four months of the Adult Adoption Information Act's jurisdiction, 3,896 original birth certificates were issued to adults wanting to search for their birth mothers – 22,926 more were issued in the following decade.

Research shows that most adults had wanted to know about their origins for some time. "Finding out more was not enough, they needed to meet and get to know birth relatives."

This vindicates the establishment of a lobby group, Adoption Action, seeking change to the law. The group aims to promote changes to adoption law and practice that will "enhance the rights and wellbeing of children affected by adoption" and "reduce the risk of sale, trafficking and inhumane treatment of children in intercountry adoption". They also research and disseminate information about adoption.

Many reviews have offered options for change most notably in 1999 when the Law Commission presented *Adoption Options for Reform*. From this, recommendations for change in adoption law and practice were published in *Adoption and its Alternatives*. The commission recommended openness in departmental and court records to "adoptees, adoptive parents and natural parents".

On July 17 2003, Lianne Dalziel argued persuasively in Parliament on the need for change. The Care of Children Act 2004 was passed but still there was no reform of adoption law.

## Open Adoption Recommended

Cathy Woods, who works on international adoptions for Child Youth and Family, says adoption is open in practice. "We talk in our education 'Ways to Care' programme [for adoptive parents] about how practice is developed and why . . . so that people come to understand the importance for the child of openness."

The department then seeks an agreement between adoptive parents and the birth mother; to facilitate some sort of contact. This may be an occasional letter or phone call. In some cases contact is more regular. In

others, for example if the baby is the result of incest or rape – not at all.

The Act doesn't exclude or prevent open adoption. By discussing the idea of contact with the birth family "you can develop practice within an Act that can bring about a shift in practice

## The Lazarus Child

Hurry away now little shawl  
I've wrapped you ready for the  
world

Against the snow coming on,  
"it's for the best" –  
my voice in the mirror pushing  
him on

Warm head fading against me  
wondering what noises he is  
making

Times I have listened for feet  
down the hall  
the power of sudden laughter,  
tears when he fell

I would wake to him calling for  
his mother  
knowing he might never know  
it's me

The less the dream of words  
became  
the more I waited for him to  
speak

Till through the crush and  
chatter of the crowd  
I am pulled by an echo, look to  
see a hand reaching

Then a face, a smile of  
recognition –  
the Lazarus child come back to  
life a man

— Gregory McNeill

without the law necessarily saying you can". But Cathy stresses that open adoption "is not enforceable in law. It's really important for all parties to understand this".

## Adoption and Rights Law

In November this year the United Nations Committee on the Rights

of the Child (CRC) agreed with the Human Rights Review Tribunal's assessment of New Zealand adoption law as being discriminatory on the grounds of age, sex, marital status, and disability. CRC recommended a prompt review to align it with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* to which New Zealand is a signatory.

The Justice Minister, Amy Adams, responded that the government's priority was to overhaul the CYF law to improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable children. "Any review of adoption law should be cognisant of (this) and, accordingly, would need to occur subsequent to that reform."

She says for now the government is satisfied the law is being interpreted "in a rights-consistent manner" and the points the tribunal raises "do not significantly impact on adoptions".

## Joy, Loss and Life

Although I grew up in a sternly legalistic "Jansenist" Church of the 1950s and 60s, I found my life being transformed by my pregnancy and childbirth, as it had been for Mary, another single mother 2000 years ago. The joy of new life growing within me was enhanced by the loving support of my family. The pregnancy was never a sad time. That came later with the loss.

I became open to new ideas and through work in social justice and theological studies, I came to know the Church as a way to God and the peace of Christ. Today I find family in the parish and joyful, welcoming parishioners with whom I share music and much more.

Though I consider myself blessed, I could never advocate for the secrecy that surrounded my adoption experience. I see a place for adoption where all parties remain connected where, as Cathy Woods says, what is best for the child is paramount "so they can grow with knowledge and acceptance". ■



Cecily McNeill is a Wellington journalist who has a 37-year-old passion for social justice which she delights in finding new ways to communicate.







## Christmas Blessing

So  
In the season  
of great paradox  
the invitation  
of the Christ child  
remains

Where there is pain  
May  
you bravely entrust  
to the wise and gracious Spirit  
that place in your heart  
least defended

May your  
most sacred vulnerability  
stay the course

For you  
May Christmas  
hold essential truth  
and be a place  
of the most imperfect  
and exquisite  
tenderness

— Christine Kelly



**C**hristmas was when Benny most missed Beryl. Yeah. Missed her like hell. All those years together making Christmas dinner for family and friends, Benny in charge of the turkey, Beryl fancifying the table with red flowers and paper hats. People called them the two B's, their four daughters catching on, saying Mum and Dad were Bumble Bees. That got reduced to Bumbles. "We're going to the Bumbles," people used to say. "No, no. Their real name is Hallinan. Fantastic hosts, those two."

But the real host was Beryl, a smashing fire-cracker of a woman, so much fun in her you'd think she'd invented laughter. Even in hospital after the stroke, she'd reached out her good arm and pinched Benny's backside, bold as brass in front of the doctor.

He steered his walker across the kitchen floor to the window, and drew back the curtains. Neighbours' houses looked dead as dodos, most people enjoying themselves someplace else, to be expected on Christmas Day, he supposed.

For two years after Beryl's passing, the four girls came with their husbands and children, but after that it was just, Jeanette the eldest, who turned up out of duty with a chook ready for the oven, a pudding the size of a soccer ball and the usual advice. Jeanette looked a taller version of Beryl but the likeness vanished the moment she opened her mouth. She phoned him every Friday night without fail.

"Dad, you've only got yourself to blame. You've turned into a grumpy, old man. Of course the grandchildren don't want to see you when you call them larrikins and imbeciles."

"Only when they deserve it," he said.

"For looking at their phones? For turning on TV?" Jeanette's voice was like broken glass.

He tried to defend himself: "They made a hell of a noise! I couldn't hear myself think."

"No! It's your ears, Dad! You're too mean to buy hearing aids."

Well, that was Jeanette, typical eldest, always had to be boss, so there was no use arguing with her. He pushed his walker back to the stove, wondering if it was too early to turn on the oven.

At least Jeanette made the effort. The others sent cards and a box of chocolates.

The new care cleaning woman had tidied the dining room so it looked bare, all his comfort cleared away. But if he gazed long enough, he could still hear Beryl's voice in the wallpaper she'd chosen when the girls left home: blue flowers on a white background, a difficult design to match at the joins. "It's good quality, Benny love, it will see us out," she said.

It was hellish stuff to hang even though she stood by the ladder, helping him match the flowers. One time, a strip curled back like giant dunny paper and draped itself over her head. She laughed. He was on the ladder

# MR BUMBLE, WE'VE COME



and she had wallpaper paste in her hair and he could see her laughing like nothing in the world deserved to be taken seriously.

Benny pulled a chair away from the table and sat heavily. It was a jolly good thing when a woman laughed at her husband's jokes. He had never been one for romantic talk but he could tease her, tell her yarns and she made him feel like a king. Sometimes they just held on to each other both laughing so much they couldn't finish what they'd started, and it was like laughter made them one anyway.

The Christmas after Daphne, their youngest, was born, Beryl hung a picture of the Holy Family in their bedroom. She said to Benny: "That's us."

"You should have got the version with four girls," joked Benny.

"I did," she pointed to the baby. "They're all him."

Another time she told him: "When a baby's born, a mother knows, truly knows, she's just given birth to God."

He folded his arms and groaned. It still happened. When he brought back her voice in his head, a pain filled his chest and arms, as though the funeral was just yesterday.



# FOR CHRISTMAS DINNER

*A story by Joy Cowley*



**No use getting down in the dumps.** It was time to switch on the oven. He turned his walker sideways so he could open the oven door. Just as he thought, black, sticky, reeking of burned fat. Cleaning ladies didn't do ovens and he couldn't stoop that far. That would make another round of ammunition for Jeanette's battle to get him to a retirement village.

"You'd make new friends, Dad," she'd said in one of her calls.

"Why the hell would I want new friends at my time of life?"

"You're lonely. You're suffering from depression. Let me talk to your doctor."

"I suffer from interfering busybodies!" he told her. "I'm staying in my own house."

"You are so negative!" she said and put down the phone.

She didn't understand. None of them understood. When it was his time to drop off his perch, he wanted to do it with his memories around him.

**The oven smell was filling the kitchen.** Where was Jeanette? She should have been here by now.

He pushed his walker through the dining room to the chair in front of the TV. He had to sit down. His hip-bone felt as though a dog was chewing it. He swung his body against the cushions cursing the weakness that made every movement strenuous effort.

After that he must have fallen asleep because he thought he was lying in bed with Beryl snuggled against his back, legs tucked into his, as warm as toast. She was so real he could feel her breathing. He tried to make the dream last but waking took over. It was the chair he could feel and the air around him was warm, thick with that smoky oven smell.

He looked at his watch. The day was almost gone. No Jeanette. No Christmas dinner. He struggled to get out of the chair.

So his eldest daughter had finally given up on him! Well, it had to happen, although she had picked a hell of a time to do it. Where was the phone? Oh! The cleaning woman! Why couldn't they leave things be? He pushed the button for Jeanette and got what he expected: "Please leave a message."

She was having a happy, merry Christmas somewhere else.

Benny put his hand on the blue and white wallpaper. "Remember you said the girls would look after us in our old age?" he reminded Beryl. Then he gripped his walker, intending to switch off the stove and make himself a sandwich.

**He didn't hear the door open.** His heart jumped with shock when he saw her. It was Beryl standing there! No, not Beryl, too tall! His daughter, Jeanette!

"Dad! Why didn't you answer your phone?"

He stared at her.

"Dad? Your phone!"

His breath came back: "You didn't ring me."

"I called five times! There was an accident on the motorway. Traffic had to detour the long way. I rang and rang, beside myself with worry!"

"Yeah?" He realised he must have been asleep. "It was that cleaning woman you got me. She shifted the phone. Did you bring the chook?"

"I brought more than that." Jeanette came through the doorway and he saw behind her two young men, a young woman, familiar but grown-up looking like their mother, all carrying plastic bins and packages.

"Happy Christmas, Grandpa!"

Benny stood with his mouth open. That one was Mike, but he'd forgotten the names of the other two.

Jeanette marched over and pecked him on the cheek: "Better late than never." She was actually smiling. "Mr Bumble, we've come for Christmas dinner." ■

Painting: *Pacifica New Chums Beach* by Caz Novak  
© Used with permission,



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# Love's Tender Sister: Mercy and Film



PAUL SORRELL considers the portrayal of mercy in contemporary films.

Pope Francis has told us that he is building his pontificate on the concept of mercy, and we have been celebrating and practising it throughout this special Jubilee Year. But what is mercy? In popular parlance, we speak of begging for mercy — for relief from impending hardship or punishment, whether deserved or not. There is a powerful treatment of this aspect of mercy in the Franco-German wartime film *Diplomacy*, in which the Swedish consul-general in Paris must draw on all his skills to persuade the German military governor not to destroy the city on Hitler's orders.

A deeper exploration of mercy and its punitive opposite is found in the Belgian-French-Italian movie *Two Days, One Night*, which I watched recently on Māori TV — an excellent source of international films for thoughtful viewers. Faced with losing her job, Sandra spends a stressful weekend visiting her co-workers at their homes, begging for their support when her fate is put to the vote on the Monday. The issue is not a simple one, as her colleagues have been offered a generous bonus if they agree to make her redundant. She gains the compassion of some, but others have already committed their anticipated windfall. At the end of the film, the tables are turned as Sandra finds herself in a position to pass on the mercy she has so desperately sought for herself. The film's broad scope allows us to consider mercy on many levels — from the heroine's personal dilemma to the power wielded by companies over workers' lives.

## The Need for Mercy

So mercy has many dimensions, ranging from the personal to the

political. It is itself part of a nexus of virtues, embracing love, compassion and forgiveness and is a powerful catalyst in the achievement of reconciliation and, beyond that, redemption. The theme of redemption is strongly present in contemporary cinema, even in films with no explicit religious content. Reconciliation, forgiveness, the freedom to make a new start — all give a deeply satisfying sense of closure to a narrative, or a human life. When this element is absent — as in Alejandro Iñárritu's epic tale of vengeance *The Revenant* — we are left feeling unsatisfied as the credits roll, even if the drama offered much that was memorable and compelling.

*Mercy often has formidable barriers to overcome, but, like her sister Love, she is equal to the task.*

Many of the films I've reviewed over the last 13 years have depicted a world without mercy. The dehumanising effect of totalitarian regimes is shown in *Sophie Scholl – The Final Days*, *Labyrinth of Lies* and *Brother Number One*, and the brutal reality of American slavery and its aftermath is powerfully explored in *12 Years a Slave* and *Selma*. Flashes of goodness illuminate these dark places in *The Lives of Others* (about the East German Stasi), *Tangerines* (set in a war zone in the Caucasus) and *The Railway Man* (of which more below). The sins of the Catholic Church are exposed to the light in *The Magdalene Sisters*, *Philomena*, *Calvary* and *Spotlight*.

## Christian Themes

At the other extreme are a handful of beautiful, explicitly Christian films, where the offering of mercy — expressed as love, service, self-sacrifice — changes lives in profound and lasting ways, albeit often via mysterious routes. In the Finnish film *Letters to Father Jacob*, Leila, a pardoned murderer, is sent to live with an elderly, blind priest who lives alone in an isolated, decaying house. Her job is to read to him the many letters he gets requesting spiritual advice and to act as his amanuensis. Morose and resentful, Leila suspects that Fr Jacob may have arranged for her to be released out of pity. When the shocking truth finally emerges, it becomes clear that she has been redeemed by the love that the old priest so often spoke about. Long buried, the fragile seeds of mercy have produced a flourishing garden of the heart.

The French film *Of Gods and Men* traces a similar path. In Algeria's Atlas Mountains a small community of Cistercian monks live in harmony with their Muslim neighbours. Br Luc runs a daily medical clinic and the Koran sits beside the Rule of St Benedict in the monks' library. When Islamist terrorists become active in the area, the brothers find themselves caught between the insurgents and an equally brutal army presence. As the monks debate whether to stay or flee, the abbot, Br Christian, urges one faltering brother: "Remember that you've already given your life. You gave it by following Christ, when you decided to leave everything . . . Our mission here is to be brothers to all . . . Love endures everything." When all but two of the monks are captured, and led away to their deaths, Christian affirms his love of



God and the Muslim people he served. Humble and selfless to the end, he sees himself as complicit in their suffering and forgives his executioner, "this friend of the last minute".

### Asking the Hard Questions

Other, secular, films tease out the many strands of mercy in their own ways. In *Still Life*, council employee John May is charged with winding up the affairs of people who have died on their own, often in cheerless circumstances, and with tracking down any remaining relatives. Quietly determined to give these folk the dignity and respect they were denied in life, he is often the only mourner at the funeral. Recognition for the overlooked and neglected in a world obsessed by "efficiency" and economics is also a major theme of the Kiwi film *The Insatiable Moon*, by Mike and Rosemary Riddell. It figures large, too, in *The Lady in the Van*, based on the memoir by Alan Bennett, and in Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake*.

Going deeper still, mercy for the despised and rejected, the most reviled members of our community (often by Christians), is solicited in films like *Vera Drake* and *The Woodsman*. The warm centre of a close-knit East London family, Vera is a kind-hearted but naïve woman who becomes a backstreet abortionist almost by accident: "I just wanted to help the poor girls out." When the police come calling, her secure world falls apart. *The Woodsman* gives us an intimate insight into the compulsions and struggles of someone who is sexually attracted to children. We are invited to have compassion on a man who seeks to "kill the paedophile within." And in tracing the lead-up to a "mercy killing", the French-language film *Amour* explores the greatest taboo of all. Director Michael Haneke shows us an elderly man struggling to care for his severely disabled wife until he has nothing left to give.

Finally, plumbing the depths of mercy and forgiveness, is the 2013 film *The Railway Man*. Having suffered terribly at the hands of his Japanese captors on the infamous Thai-Burma railroad during the Second World War, Eric can think only of revenge when he learns that his chief tormentor is working as a peace activist at the site of the former prison camp in Thailand. Although Eric's gradual change of attitude towards his former enemy is mediated through external events, rather than the murkier passages of the heart, the theme of reconciliation emerges strongly. Through their painful encounters, both men learn that mercy is a reciprocal gift; it is granted only when we show it to others, and is life-transforming in its effects.

Mercy often has formidable barriers to overcome, but, like her sister Love, she is equal to the task. ■

Film stills (from top): *Two Days, One Night*; *The Lady in a Van*; *Tangerines*; *Letters to Father Jacob*; *Philomena*; *The Railway Man*.



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## Reading Luke 1:39-56 Ecologically

Through a close reading of Luke 1:39-56 ELAINE WAINWRIGHT draws attention to the ecological context of the meeting of the pregnant women, Mary and Elizabeth.

**Luke 1:39** In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup> where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and

exclaimed with a loud cry: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me, that the mother of the holy one comes to me? <sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed

is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the word of God." <sup>46</sup> And Mary said, "My soul magnifies my God, <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour . . . <sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home. NRSV

"In those days Mary set out . . . to a Judean town." This well-known text that we call "The Visitation" opens readers into two significant ways in which the human community understands its place in the cosmos, namely time and space. So often in reading our biblical text, we tend to read over these elements as merely backdrop to a divine/human drama. In seeking to read our sacred story ecologically as part of developing

an ecological consciousness, I have suggested that we read not only for the human and holy but also for habitat and the profound interconnectedness of those three. They draw us into a new way of being, as well as a new way of reading.

### Story Unfolding in Time

The opening phrase: "In those days", locates us as readers in time, one of the inescapable frameworks through

which we interpret and order our world. The phrase would not have been understood by first-century readers/hearers as linear calendric days, as we do now. It would more likely have caught up its hearers into life's processes unfolding in a spiralling movement rather than in linear form. The angel's words to Mary: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son" (Lk 1:31), set a process in motion that readers know will unfold in the



days that are forthcoming. Attentiveness to the phrase: “In those days”, can, therefore, invite readers into a new mode of conceiving and engaging with time. Our present carries in it what has gone before and it anticipates what will unfold in spiralling rather than linear mode.

## Story Unfolding in Place

As readers encounter Mary setting out in haste to go to a Judean town in the hill country, they are reminded that our sacred story unfolds not only in time but also in space/place. In this instance, the place is an unnamed village in the Judean hill country surrounding Jerusalem. The Lucan narrator doesn't pause even to tell readers the name of the village but the story cannot proceed without place/the village and all this referent evokes. The narrator is more concerned with what happens in the village, namely Mary's entering the house of Zechariah and greeting Elizabeth. Just as there was no pausing over the identity of the village, so too the reader is moved quickly over the patriarchal structure of the household (it is Zechariah's). The ecological reader notes the necessary critique of such a structure in order to prevent it from being read as norm. Here, however, the reader is moved on to the focal point of the narrative: Mary greets Elizabeth. In that action, two women pregnant with new life, touch and embrace.

Many beautiful images capture this embrace most poignantly in its bodyliness, its materiality. Each woman carries in her body new life at different points of gestation. They touch each other and in that movement each gives and each receives touch; they touch and they are touched. The material body of each conveys a message to the other, a message that is holy, a message that is of the holy.

Words or sound burst forth from Mary as greeting. Elizabeth *hears*, she hears the sound of the greeting. The narrative draws readers' attention to a second sense—that of hearing. The meeting and greeting passing between these two women set a movement in play in the womb of Elizabeth — the child in her womb leaps for joy and she is filled with a spirit that is holy. The holy plays within the human as habitat in all its materiality.

Such play of the holy continues as Elizabeth cries out: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” She proclaims Mary as “blessed among women”, blessed among the community of women.

In her, Elizabeth sees the holy playing among women, playing in places or more particularly playing among people where the holy was little expected because of the dominant patriarchal perspectives. Elizabeth also proclaims the child taking shape in the womb of Mary as blessed: blessed is the fruit of your womb. Her words turn our attention as readers to the materiality of the promised child in the womb of the mother. This in turn reminds us of Anne Elvey's insight that the birth of the child signals the birth of the mother as mother. All of this unfolds in the body, the material body of a woman, habitat for the holy.

## Interrelationship of Holy, Human and Habitat

The narrative of the visitation concludes with verse Lk1: 45: “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the word of

God.” The often repeated word “blessed” in this narrative designates a wisdom proclamation referring to those who are in right relationship with God (eg, Pss. 1:1; 32:1-2). For the ecological reader, that right relationship extends to the holy-human-habitat interrelationship. It is in the flesh that Mary has conceived. It is in her body that she has believed. In this same body she receives “what was spoken to her”.

The text moves from here to the well-known *Song of Mary*, the *Magnificat*. It is not possible in the space of this article to turn an ecological lens onto this song. Rather the final words of this reading turn to the concluding verse of the selected narrative, namely Lk1: 56: “And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.”

As at the beginning of the narrative, time and place play within an ecological reading. Mary remains with Elizabeth “about three months” and then returns to her home. It is the material space that she left earlier to come into the “hill country of Judea”. It is the space within which a most remarkable narrative of bodies touching and being touched has played out and has drawn readers into the places, the spaces, the materiality in which the intimate relationship between habitat, human and holy unfolds. ■

Painting: *Visitation* by Bradi Barth © www.bradi-barth.org  
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**Elaine Wainwright RSM** is the Executive Director of Mission and Ministry for the Mercy Sisters in Australia and Papua New Guinea. She is a biblical scholar of international repute.



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# A LIFE-CHANGING JOURNEY



KATHLEEN RUSHTON interprets Matthew 2:1-12 reflecting on the Magi's visit to the newly-born Jesus in Bethlehem.

**T**he feast of the Epiphany, also known as the Twelfth Day or Twelfth Night, was established by the end of the second century and celebrated long before the feast of Christmas. As well as the feast, the term "epiphany" is used of a moment when one feels suddenly that one understands, or becomes conscious of something important, triggered by new information, which allows a leap of understanding.

I was waiting to pay a traffic fine at a local Westpac Bank. Inside was a large, shiny, red, upmarket version of the humble farm-bike with a placard exhorting people to take out

an easy-to-action loan to purchase this \$9,800 +GST vehicle for a Christmas gift. Another poster gave a financial countdown to Christmas: if paid fortnightly — so many pay days to go. Two recent experiences highlighted just how distorted the meaning of Christmas has become. First was participating in the "Reverse Greed: Heal the Earth" series, which included a seminar on banks. The second was my research on banks that invest in fossil fuels. The bank's "gift" loans land people in debt and imbed consumerism in our society. Further such loans bolster Westpac's profits, which despite their claim to be leading in sustainability, are heavily invested in fossil fuels and bankrolling new coal mining ventures (*Fossil Free Banks Report* 350.org.nz/).

In light of the above we can look carefully at Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished painting, "The Adoration of the Magi", commissioned by the monks of San Donato a Scopeto, Florence, in 1481. In the foreground many people surround the baby Jesus. In the background behind Jesus, Mary and the Magi are crumbling buildings and men fighting on horseback. Da Vinci captures elements of Matthew 2:1-12 which other artists miss: Jesus the Messiah comes into a world of chaos and decay which needs change. What would we paint into the background to sketch the context in which we tell the story of the Epiphany today? How might our reflection during this Christmas season lead us more deeply into *whakawhanaungatanga*/making right relationship happen with *Atua*/God, *tangata*/people and *whenua*/land?

## Geography and Time

In Mt 2:1, we find Jesus' birth notice and an introduction to the characters. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, an insignificant village, about eight kilometres south of Jerusalem, the centre of power. Bethlehem was the ancestral home of David and was where he was anointed king by the prophet Samuel. Jesus, son

Painting: Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished *The Adoration of the Magi*.

**Feast of the Epiphany  
Sunday 8 January**



of David (Mt 1:1, 17, 20), was born there “in the days of King Herod.” At this stage in the story we are given no information about Herod. However it is well-known he was a puppet of Imperial Rome and was notorious for his cruelty, political skill and massive building projects. Then the word “behold” (also used in Mt 1:20, 23) turns our attention to “Magi from the East [who] came from Jerusalem.”

## The Magi

The most accurate way to name the visitors from the East is to call them “Magi”. To use “wise men” is too wide a term, “kings” is incorrect and although “astrologers” is nearly correct, it is confusing because of the meaning of that term today. The Magi were a high-ranking, priestly class of political-religious advisors who served the rulers of Media and what later became the empires of Persia (approximately the areas of modern Iran and Iraq). While they had access to the centres of power, they were sometimes seen as a threat to royal power because of their influence in predicting future events and their astrological knowledge. They were regarded as being able to recognise the signs of the times. The Magi from the East were Gentiles and they did not know the Scriptures. However they had alternative ways of knowing — the mystery of a star to find Jesus, and dreams to “take a different way” to avoid Herod. Matthew is highlighting that all do not come to Jesus by the same way. God uses unexpected means. This sets up what recurs in Matthew — Jesus, Israel’s King, is recognised and welcomed by the least expected people.

The Magi come from Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish history and tradition, which in Matthew’s gospel is the stronghold of the corrupt political power and authority of the Jewish leaders. It does not stand for the whole Jewish people. There is a powerful/powerless contrast throughout Matthew — the lowly receive Jesus (his parents, the twelve) and the powerful reject him (Herod, Pharisees, Scribes, Pilate). Frightened that the Magi were seeking the new-born King of Jews, Herod calls in the Jewish leaders, who were colonised and subservient to Rome, to interpret the Scriptures. According to the prophet, a ruler will be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2).

## “To Shepherd My People”

Herod sends the Magi to Bethlehem with instructions to bring him word when they had found the child. Setting out they saw the star ahead of them and followed it until “it stopped over the place where the child was.” Jesus is not named but referred to as “the child” for the first of eight times in this chapter. This is significant, for in that cultural world often children were viewed with suspicion and seen as a threat to adult male civic order. They were weak, vulnerable and marginal, as are Jesus and the children massacred (Mt 2:15, 18) in the face of the murderous power of Herod.


“Overwhelmed by joy” (Mt 2:10) when the star stopped, the Magi entered “the household” — not a stable or cave as the shepherds do in Luke’s gospel. The Magi’s actions of prostrating themselves, paying Jesus homage, and “opening

their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh”, evoke many Scripture references. They include the Gentiles’ journey to Jerusalem to worship God (Mic 4:1–2), or the king as representative of God’s justice (Psalm 72:10–11). The coming of the Gentiles is part of the vision of God’s justice being restored on earth (Isaiah 60:14). On such journeys, Gentile kings bring gifts (Ps 72:10). Yet Matthew subverts these biblical traditions, for kings like Herod do not come to worship or welcome Jesus. Rather than the kings themselves, the marginal Magi, advisors of kings, come. And they come not to Jerusalem or the Temple but to insignificant Bethlehem. Rulers of this world, too, assemble against God’s anointed One (Ps 2:2). In Mt 2:6, the new-born king will be a ruler who is “to shepherd my people Israel” (Mic 5:2), which suggests a very different model and function of power.

Gold from the seams of the Earth, frankincense and myrrh (made from tree resin), are the gifts placed before Jesus. How practical such gifts are is not the question. The Magi give what they have. We bring gifts too. What gifts do we place? What “star” guides us? Having met Jesus, will we now take “a different way” and *whakawhanaungatanga*/make right relationship happen with *Atua*/God, *tangata*/people and *whenua*/land? ■



**Kathleen Rushton** RSM tends her vegetable garden, walks in the hope her feet will allow her to tramp again and delights in learning about Scripture.




### YEAR OF MERCY

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# Treading Lightly in the World

a GEN-Y  
perspective

As we approach the end of the year and a fresh batch of graduates finishes exams and enters the world searching for experience, nuggets of truth and meaning, it is timely to think about our impact in the world and the ripple of our actions.

There are many people in the world who intensely and deeply feel pain for the human rights travesties that we see on the news. The feeling of helplessness we experience when we see refugees who will live their entire lives in refugee camps; people without basic access to food and water; and families suffering unnecessarily due to lack of access to medicines, is a physical wound in our consciousness and a weight on our shoulders. Those of us privileged to live with relative opportunity can experience anger in the face of this reality.

It is natural to want to take action against this serious injustice. However, we need to think carefully before rushing off to “do good” in the world. The concept of “voluntourism” has become popular in recent years among young graduates, primarily using their traditional “overseas experience” to travel to developing countries and volunteer in organisations making a positive contribution in small communities.

Louise Carr-Neil, an Auckland native living in Hamilton, is passionate about gender equality and human rights. In her spare time she enjoys running and vegetarian cooking.



In theory this sounds like a perfect match-up — young, enthusiastic westerners contributing their time to help people in need — but there are many nuances to this trend that we need to be aware of.

Volunteering is useful only if it benefits the communities in which the volunteers are working. When I was living in Cambodia, I attended a fund-raising event to give family support in local communities. The event organisers had the *kaupapa*/policy advocating that orphanages were to be used as an absolute last resort for children. Sadly, through the course of the night, we learned that since Cambodia's borders had opened to the world in the 1990s the number of orphanages had increased by 70 per cent. This showed a direct correlation between tourist numbers and the numbers of children who were put into care. Further, more than half the children in orphanage care had at least one parent alive. Quite simply, there is a supply and demand infrastructure around vulnerable children in developing countries that is driven by the marketing of the volunteer experience.

Another problematic aspect affecting orphanage care is the length of time for which the “volunteer opportunity” is marketed. Most stays are short term. Vulnerable children create emotional attachments to the volunteers but they will stay in their lives for a few weeks at the most. The constant turn-over exposes the children to emotional trauma.

On a wider scale, “voluntourism”

also runs the risk of taking job opportunities away from local people. Teaching English can be a popular way for volunteers to contribute to communities. However a steady stream of volunteers can jeopardise the chances of capable locals from gaining this employment. It also applies to other volunteer work such as building houses. In fact there have been cases of volunteers constructing buildings in communities who have no need for them. The work was simply an income stream for the companies that organise volunteer opportunities.

Sometimes the best way we can do good in the world is to commit to doing no harm. Being mindful of our impact and considering the long-term repercussions of our actions, is vital to our own *kaupapa* of helping those who are less fortunate than ourselves. ■

## Advocacy & Research Manager



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# TRIUMPH, TRAGEDY AND TRANSFORMATION

It is 1968 and I'm circling in bright sunlight over a snow-covered Chicago airport waiting to land. The snow ploughs clear the runway as the plane descends into a narrow corridor with towering mountains of snow on either side. Little do I know that I am also descending into one of the most turbulent periods in United States history since the Civil War.

The Catholic Lay Movements, my hosts in each US city I was visiting, were heavily involved in the political struggles.

I was taken to a secret meeting of African Americans, all involved in the Civil Rights Movement, who were running a pipeline for youth to escape the draft to the immoral war in Vietnam. The FBI was vigorously prosecuting draft dodgers. Civil disobedience was escalating everywhere. In the evening thousands of people opposed to the draft gathered at a teach-in at the local university to hear famous political leaders denounce the war. Marches and gatherings were often broken up by the police, who became more and more violent in handling the demonstrations. America was completely polarised. Many believed that civil war was possible.

Despite the passing of the Voting Rights Act in 1965 which aimed to overcome legal barriers that prevented African Americans from exercising



their right to vote, the law could not change hearts.

Earlier that day I toured a burnt-out, inner-city Detroit after having slept the night on the office floor of the Young Christian Workers in Windsor, Ontario. I learned that white people needed to stay in their cars with one foot near the accelerator. The Civil Rights Movement was on the boil in all the main cities.

The previous month I slept overnight in a seminary opposite the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC. I had started a debate with the students over the morality of building a US\$43 million shrine in the middle of a poverty-stricken, black ghetto. The seminarians were leading guided tours of the shrine for pocket money. They invited me to stay. The gospel was at the centre of the discourse. The impact of Vatican II and the World Council of Churches'

global gathering at Uppsala had hit the United States.

I was shown the skid rows of many of these cities, of the richest country in the world. People were eating from soup kitchens and, immersed in drugs and violence, were sleeping on footpaths.

As I left Los Angeles for Auckland in late March 1968, traumatic events would soon change America forever. The hopes of millions of anti-war and civil rights protestors

were momentarily shattered with the assassination of Martin Luther King in April and Bobby Kennedy in June, followed by riots at the Democratic National convention and "shoot to kill" police policies in Chicago. Peaceful race demonstrations became riots. The successful Tet Offensive, a North Vietnamese victory, signalled to the American public the lie of the Vietnam War and the Catonsville Nine, led by the Jesuit, Daniel Berrigan, and his brother, Philip Berrigan, a Josephite priest at the time, burnt draft cards and waited to be arrested.

The protests of the 1960s, despite continuous wars, killed the draft, created an effective women's movement, gay rights' movement, environmental movement, undreamt-of long-term gains for African Americans. They triggered changes, now enshrined in legislation in many countries, including Aotearoa.

The turbulence surrounding the election of Donald Trump this year has uncovered many of the same historic divisions among the people as were exposed nearly 50 years ago. The USA is a country divided by race, class and gender. Once again, the capacity of US institutions to respond creatively will be tested to the limit. As in 1968, the USA could be in for another period of tragedy, triumph and transformation. ■



**Robert Consedine:** "My Irish revolutionary ancestors and my Catholic experience taught me justice. I have always been surrounded by love and wisdom and trust the invisible world."

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# The Strength of Her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women

Edited by Elizabeth A. Johnson

Published by Orbis Books, 2016

Reveiwed by Helen Bergin OP

**T**he *Strength of Her Witness* is a treasure trove for readers interested in feminist approaches to Jesus' person and mission. After a pertinent Introduction, the Editor, well-esteemed North American theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson, presents three biblical scholars who reflect on the risen Jesus encountering Mary Magdalen. While each scholar highlights Mary Magdalen's fundamental witness to God's saving power, the book's title also affirms God's abiding trust in women as witnesses to Christ.

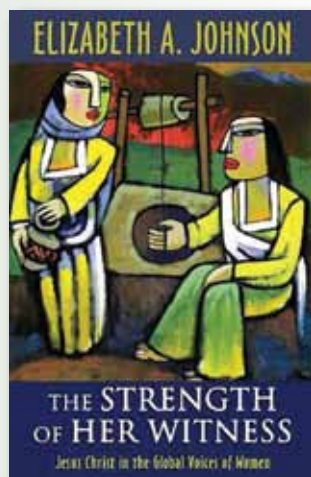
Section Two, *Sweeping Overviews*, offers four chapters, including one by Jewish contributor Judith Plaskow and another by Australian biblical scholar, Elaine Wainwright, who emphasise Jesus' mission as being "with community" and Jesus Himself as revealing God's "Wisdom".

In the 12 chapters of Section Three women from differing contexts engage vitally with Christology. I note two local chapters – one by Australian Aboriginal woman, Lee Meina Skye, and another by Ni-Vanuatu woman, Judith Vusi.

Skye argues that Christ's gender is not problematical for Aboriginal women but that Christ's humanity and saving power are fundamental. For many indigenous people, it's Christ's "Spirit" which shapes and nourishes their spirituality.

Vusi links Jesus Christ with an indigenous dwarf-like figure whose red taro, rejected by locals, flavoured and coloured the entire dish when harvested. Likewise, Christ empowers women to use their small but precious gifts.

Finally in Section Four, six chapters highlight powerfully numerous implications for readers of belonging



to "the Body" of Christ. It is here that contributors raise especially thought-provoking contemporary questions.

For example, Kwok Pui-lan in *Engendering Christ* questions traditional "Christ" images which have often done injustice to a Jesus who challenged the empire, its taxation systems and most contemporary political and religious leaders. Likewise, Mary Shawn Copeland focusing on the "boundary-breaking" image of Jesus, argues for greater inclusivity of persons within today's Body of Christ, reminding readers to reflect on those who are not welcomed into Christ's Body and those ignored as unworthy or unsuitable.

In 25 chapters, *The Strength of her Witness* exceeds 300 pages and offers international feminist writing on Jesus Christ from 1990 to 2013. This excellent book will appeal especially to feminist scholars but many chapters offer first-time readers an accessible and helpful glimpse into global research which attention to Jesus Christ has provoked in recent decades. ■

## Women Deacons? Essays with Answers

Edited by Phyllis Zagano

Published by Liturgical Press

Reviewed by Diana Atkinson

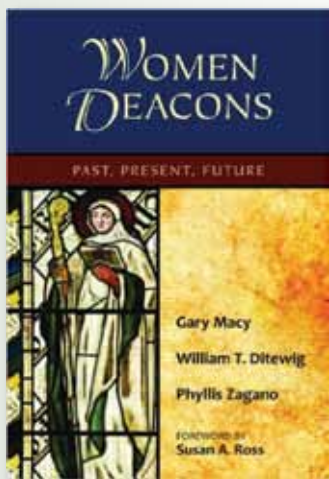
**W**herever you are on the spectrum of support or distaste for the ministry of women deacons, this book will intrigue you. Phyllis Zagano has provided richly-detailed accounts of the tradition of the ordination of women as deacons. In 12 chapters you can tap into the research of biblical scholars and historians of patristic and medieval times and beyond. This is the first English translation of some essays and a mine of information about the history of women deacons.

You can read of the ministry of women deacons in Scripture, in the ancient Church, in Byzantine, Greek, Egyptian and monastic traditions. This is heady stuff. Some of it, however, is not for the casual reader. Chapter One's exegesis of Romans 16:1–2 with its emphasis on syntax and semantics and a liberal sprinkling of Greek may delight biblical scholars but possibly deter many of us from reading further. Persist. You are soon romanced into a breadth of discussion from Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopian and Arabic writings and translations.

This is not a collection of recent research. Some essays come from post-Vatican II days and Zagano includes women scholars as well as essays from Cipriano Vagaggini, Philippe Delhaye and Yves Congar, who are no longer with us.

The subtitle suggests these are essays with answers; there have been centuries of questions. Were women deacons wives of deacons or deacons in their own right? Were women who minister to others laity or clergy? Is the ordination of women deacons a





sacrament, sacramental, or merely a blessing? Should women deacons be under the bishop or rather images of the Holy Spirit? And in the western Church where the diaconal service of women was subsumed into religious profession, will the ordination of women deacons today be the Trojan horse for priesthood?

Through a wide range of well-referenced chapters, answers emerge. It is clear that the ministry of women deacons arose from need and while many eastern Churches have retained the tradition, in the West, tied to the question of women as priests, it has declined.

Zagano's answers are clear. She shows how ancient and contemporary ceremonies for women demonstrate the tradition of the ordination of women as deacons. It was never seen as a step toward priesthood.

Peter Hünemann provides answers for our times. He links ministry with mission, refers to women as partners, skirts around ordination with alternatives to sacramental powers as he writes of representing the mission of Christ, building up communities and equipping them for mission. He writes of women deacons once again in the context of need — of mission, the laity, community, while avoiding a contribution to clericalism. He wrote over forty years ago.

You can't help but be informed, if not overwhelmed, by the research and knowledge that Zagano has made available. Pick and choose your chapters and if you are not a biblical scholar, don't start at the beginning. ■



## The Light between Oceans

Directed by Derek Cianfrance

Reviewed by Paul Sorrell

**B**rimming with passion and intensity, *The Light between Oceans* exploits the strongest emotional bond of all – that between a mother and her child. It also draws on the mythic or fairytale motif of a mysterious child discovered in a drifting boat (think Moses in the bulrushes) to give the film a powerful narrative charge.

I was keen to see this film, partly because parts of it were filmed around Dunedin and included a couple of my friends as extras. So it was pleasing to identify a street scene in Port Chalmers and to see the picturesque Anglican church and graveyard at Warrington. However, the onscreen action is set in Western Australia, where Tom (Michael Fassbender), freshly returned from the horrors of the Western Front, takes on a temporary job as a lighthouse keeper on a remote, storm-lashed island.

The job soon becomes permanent and, following a brief courtship, he is joined by Isabel (Alicia Vikander), a lively young woman from a prominent local family. As he himself admits, Tom's experience of war has deadened and darkened his inner life. Isabel's vitality seems to release him from these bonds and transform him into a committed, loving husband. The couple cope well with the isolation and hardships of life on the island,

but their relationship is tested by two late-term miscarriages. When a swaddled baby arrives mysteriously in the surf, the temptation to keep it as her own, and say nothing to the authorities, is too much for Isabel.

Inevitably, the identity of baby Lucy's true parents is discovered, and the couple's decision to keep the child creates a moral dilemma that Tom cannot put to rest. The deep sense of duty that his war service has engrained in him emerges to sabotage their happiness. The lighthouse he serves, Janus Rock, looks both ways, not only to the two oceans it separates, but also to Tom's own past and future lives. This unpredictable interplay between past and future is complemented by the pervasive theme and imagery of light – almost every scene is memorably lit, whether a sunset at sea or a family relaxing in their garden.

If *The Light between Oceans* has a fault, then there is just too much passion on display for the audience to deal with. Director Derek Cianfrance has fallen into the trap of overloading the currents of emotion that already flow through the film like a river. Nevertheless, the tangled skeins are unravelled towards the end of this lengthy (133 minutes) film, producing a longed-for catharsis. Take plenty of hankies. ■



## What's in a name?

As St Thomas Aquinas pointed out we cannot describe God except by analogy. Christians have applied different names to Jesus in a feeble attempt to portray his divinity. An example is "Christ-child". In order to exhibit the veneration due to the person of Jesus the term "Christ the King" is used. Applying this to the infant was an attempt to show how, from the beginning, Jesus was "one in being with the father" (Nicea 325). A negative consequence was the gradual development of applying the earthly trappings of kings to the leaders of the Church.

The kings had their courts (*curia* in Latin) the leaders of which were the nobles, known as cardinals in the Papal court. Bishops of some important dioceses were also given that title. With a few exceptions, administrative ability was a requirement; this led to an unconscious bias favouring the *status quo*.

In 1947 Pius XII broke with tradition and appointed a significant number of cardinals from outside Europe and this practice continues. Pope Francis has adopted radical new criteria, appointing men known for their pastoral approach, encapsulated in accompaniment and mercy.

## Cardinals as Pastors

The saccharine sentimentality of the "Baby Jesus" approach has a certain appeal. But the authentic meaning of the Nativity is to be found in the total life of Christ — the prophetic interpretation which portrays someone whose life and attitudes are the polar opposites of earthly kingship.

Pope Francis has chosen cardinals from local Churches — large, small, isolated, and/or persecuted — because they have the "smell of the

sheep". In various addresses to Papal *Nuncios* he has said he wants pastors who are "close to the people"; "gentle, patient and merciful; animated by inner poverty, the freedom of the Lord and also by outward simplicity and austerity of life." They should "not have the psychology of 'princes'."

## God is With Us

"Emmanuel" applied to Jesus means God is with us. It indicates that the one who is vulnerable, who accompanies us and requires us to be apostles of God's mercy to those with whom we come in contact, is another aspect of the true meaning of Christmas.

At his October meeting with Anglican Archbishop Welby, Francis recalled that a pastoral staff often has a pointy bit at the bottom. This is to prod sheep "that tend to stand too close and shut in, urging them to get out. The mission of the pastors is to help the flock entrusted to them, that it be always out-going, on the move to proclaim the joy of the Gospel;

not closed in tight circles, in ecclesial 'microclimates' which would take us back to the days of clouds and thick darkness."

## Blessings

Recently in Sweden Francis proposed six new beatitudes for the modern era:

- "Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others, and forgive them from their heart.  
Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalised, and show them their closeness.  
Blessed are those who see God in every person, and strive to make others also discover him.  
Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home.  
Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others.  
Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians." ■



**TUI MOTU InterIslands**  
*The Independent Catholic Magazine Limited*

*Tui Motu - InterIslands* is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge, and contribute to its discussion of spiritual, social and ecological issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed.

The name *Tui Motu* was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means "stitching the islands together...", bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

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We welcome letters of comment, discussion, response, affirmation or argument of up to 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge longer letters, while keeping the meaning.

We do not publish anonymous letters except in exceptional circumstances.

## PERES NOT REMEMBERED AS PEACEMAKER BY ALL

*Crosscurrents* (TM Nov 2016) reminds us how Shimon Peres, who died this year, was praised as peacemaker by the West. Yet Shimon Peres is not remembered as a "man of peace" by Lebanese and Palestinians. Peres was a member of the Zionist militia *Haganah*, which enforced Plan Dalet, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian villages, when Israel was formed. He is hated in Lebanon for ordering the bombing of a UN shelter in the village of Qana in 1996, killing and wounding hundreds of innocent people.

Shimon Peres's greatest "achievement" was plotting with Western help to establish the Dimona nuclear reactor. Now Israel is a nuclear power. Peace groups warn of the urgent need to abolish nuclear weapons which hang like a "Damocles sword" over the heads of all humanity. Iran has called for a nuclear-free Middle East but Israel refuses.

The current Israeli government is the most right-wing ever. Israel will not change without outside pressure. Israeli human rights activists as well as Palestinians acknowledge this. In 2005 Palestinian NGOs and community groups appealed to global civil society for non-violent solidarity and support in the form of BDS – boycott, divest, sanction. Palestinians crave and deserve, as all people do, a true peace based on freedom and justice.

**Lois Griffiths, Christchurch**

## INSPIRATION FROM MYSTIC

I thought this quote from Meister Eckhart fitted well with the TM November theme:  
"Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things.

Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God.

Every creature is a word of God.  
If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature – even a caterpillar – I would never have to prepare a sermon.

So full of God is every creature."  
**Pat Hick, Cambridge**

## ALWAYS SOMETHING TO LEARN

When *Tui Motu* arrives at our house I do not open it. I read the back cover – Kaaren Mathias. Her articles are always very human but there is something to learn. One gets the feeling: "Yes I could do something like that." Her faith is practical and inspiring, her actions caring and humble. One almost gets the idea she has read some of the Pope's encyclicals before he wrote them!

**Dennis Veal, Timaru**

## VALUABLE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION RESOURCE

The arrival of TM November issue was a timely and informative resource for our students who are currently studying the Stewardship of the Earth in Religion and Ethics. In fact

every edition this year has been relevant with all of Study of Religion and Religion and Ethics students. On behalf of the students and myself congratulations to all your writers on an inspiring and valuable magazine.

**Margaret O'Reilly,  
St Joseph's Nudgee College,  
Queensland.**

## GREAT MINDS THINK ALIKE

Pope Francis would dearly love the passage from Shakespeare's, *The Merchant of Venice*: "The quality of mercy is not strained, It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes;  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown;  
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty, Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings,  
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings, It is an attribute to God himself, And earthly power doth then show likeliest God's  
When mercy seasons justice . . ."

**Fr Max Palmer, Kopua**

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# Looking OUT and IN

It was a hot night on the bus, the air thick and still. All of us sitting on the floor in the aisle were crammed close with bags and bodies pressing in on us. None of the breeze rattling in the open windows made it down to us. I was feeling put out, hot and groggy with sleep. I hadn't been able to get a train ticket and catching a night bus across Uttar Pradesh in the soup-like heat of monsoon was not my idea of fun.

The night grousched on. The other aisle sitters and myself moved our legs stiffly forward and back in their small constrained spaces. I must have dozed as I found my head resting on the thigh of a woman perched on the neighbouring seat. She didn't mind so I just kept it there. Half-way through the bleary journey we stopped at a *chai* shop. The mosquitoes moved in. All that warm flesh lusciously trapped ready for a blood meal. The air impossibly became even thicker and hotter . . .

Fortitude.

Emotional strength and firmness in difficulties. Constancy in the pursuit of good.

Fortitude is one of the four cardinal virtues but being able to sit and "forbear" a difficult time without making a noise, and then getting on

with the next thing doesn't seem to be a vaunted 21st century skill.

In a very popular TED talk Angela Duckworth explained how "grit" — perseverance and passion for long-term goals — is a significant predictor of success. Many psychologists and parents speak of the importance of not protecting our children unduly from the rough and tumble of life. I certainly want my four children to learn and show "grit" — to stick with their decision to play badminton this term, to do piano practice, to follow their goals through and be able to deal with an occasional overnight bus journey that seems unendingly hot and crowded.

Blairly I looked around at my co-passengers in various states of sweaty grogginess. Suddenly my eyes fell on the father at the front of the bus, sitting cross-legged on the knobbly plastic hood over the engine, facing us. In his arms were the lumpy rags of a sleeping pre-schooler. While I was mentally griping in my own discomfort and hatching schemes to negotiate more leg space, this man in his grimy check shirt had been sitting there with his little child on his lap for at least the four to five hours since I had climbed aboard.

He seemed to have no one else to share the load of holding his sleeping child and he must have had cramping back muscles from sitting so long with no backrest. Yet he was providing a comfortable rest for his little one and looked peaceful and accepting. This was the task he was called to do at this time and he sat gazing ahead, waiting for this journey to be over. He won't be posting anything about it on Facebook or social media. He's just getting on with life as is required of him.

For people who are poor and who have few choices, the long-term goal is perhaps a determination to stay alive. For them, perhaps fortitude is developed innately and profoundly. No TED talks or constructed "do it hard" experiences are needed. In first century Palestine riding a donkey to Bethlehem in late pregnancy might have been similarly grit producing for Mary.

I, of course, reach my destination and am re-united with my husband and kids. My life with comfort and choices is resumed. But I carry with me the image of this strong, kind father. Sitting with such equanimity in a hard place. Uncomplaining. Showing fortitude.

Brother Roger of Taizé writes: "In following you, O Christ, we choose to love and not to harden our hearts, even when the incomprehensible happens. As we remain in your presence with perseverance, day after day, and pray with simplicity of heart, you come and make us into people who are a leaven of confident trust by the way we live. And all that your Gospel calls us to, all that you ask of us, you give." ■



**Kaaren Mathias** lives in north India and works in community mental health in Uttarakhand state and for the NGO Emmanuel Hospital Association.



## Blessing

As fruit is stirred into the mixture  
and baked  
wafting spicy aromas  
arousing joyful anticipation  
transforming into rich cake  
Gather us as family this Christmas  
Tender God.

From the Tui Motu team